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Agencies held free to apply polygraph

By Glenn Emery
WASHINGTON TIMES STAFF

The temporary suspension of a Reagan administration proposal to subject government workers to increased lie detector testing and censorship does not preclude federal agencies from acting independently to screen prospective employees by use of polygraphs, according to congressional sources.

It also does not prevent agency employees from being subjected to lifetime censorship if they handle classified information, the sources say.

White House officials announced last week that the two controversial provisions were being "held in abeyance" until "further notice."

But congressional sources say that, although the Feb. 17 memorandum from National Security Adviser William C. McFarlane suspending the provisions frees federal agencies from the obligation of developing such regulations, it does not preclude agencies from proceeding on their own.

"The president's directive said that all the agencies have to develop these

policies on polygraphs and pre-publication review rights — that it was a mandatory thing, something they *must* do. Now, because of this so-called suspension, they don't have to develop these policies, but it doesn't mean that they can't or that they won't," said a House staffer.

The directive has been a target in Congress since it was signed by President Reagan last March, and at least one bill has been introduced to prevent it from becoming effective.

In testimony yesterday before Congress, critics railed against the directive and urged speedy passage of a bill introduced by Rep. Jack Brooks, D-Texas, to block the measure. The suspension of the two provisions, they argued, was only a temporary measure, and implementation of the directive eventually could lead to widespread screening of government employees through polygraph testing.

Although lie detectors have long been used to screen prospective employees of intelligence agencies and for criminal investigations, the president's directive seeks "to broaden somewhat the use . . . of polygraphs in the investigations of leaks of classified information" throughout the government, said acting Assistant Attorney General Richard K. Willard, the principal architect of the directive.

Defense Department officials testified before the House Civil Service subcommittee that proposed changes in that agency's polygraph program, which would greatly expand the use of lie detector testing of its employees, were still under active consideration. Congress has placed a ban on any such changes until after April 15.

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